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MEMORANDUM

TO: Dave Anderson, Planning Commission Chair

FROM: Garner Stoll, Assistant Director *GS*
Planning and Development Review Department

DATE: September 4, 2013

SUBJECT: *Imagine Austin: The Way Forward 2013 Annual Report*

On June 14, 2012, the City Council adopted the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan (Ordinance # 20120614-058).

Pursuant to the City Charter and p. 223 of Imagine Austin, an annual report is required to assess the City's progress in accomplishing the programs identified in Imagine Austin. The annual report shall contain:

- Projects and policies (including capital improvements) implemented and the alignment of these projects and policies with the plan.
- A matrix indicating the implementation status of each priority program
- A work plan for the coming year
- Suggestions for updates to the comprehensive plan needed to respond to new issues and changing conditions.

The annual report is to be submitted by the Planning Commission to the Mayor and City Council.

Imagine Austin: The Way Forward 2013 Annual Report is divided into five sections:

Section 1: The Executive Summary contains a brief description of progress made as well as a matrix of the achievements of each priority program team.

Section 2: Introduction describes the organization of the annual report and key concepts of Imagine Austin.

Section 3: Five-Point Implementation Program describes the key achievements of the past year for each method of implementation. The five methods of implementation are

- Education and Engagement

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- Internal Alignment
 - Regulations
 - Public Investment
 - Partnerships

Section 4: Priority Programs describes the purpose of priority programs, the makeup of the teams, current conditions, achievements from the past year, on-going initiatives, spotlight projects, and resources to find more information.

Section 5: Appendices includes:

- Purpose of the Annual Report
- Action Matrix
- Selected Complete Community Indicators
- Outreach Events
- Minor corrections and additions to Imagine Austin

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends forwarding *Imagine Austin: The Way Forward 2013 Annual Report* as recommended by the Comprehensive Plan Committee of Planning Commission to the City Council.



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September 10, 2013

Mayor, City Council, and City Manager:

The Planning Commission is tasked with providing an annual report detailing progress made regarding *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan (Imagine Austin)* implementation. In response to this charge, the Planning Commission would first like to express its support of the *Imagine Austin: The Way Forward 2013 Annual Report*

The Comprehensive Plan Committee met with staff from the Planning and Development Review Department to review the 2013 Annual Report. We learned that in the first year following the adoption of *Imagine Austin*, much of the effort has been focused on establishing interdepartmental priority program teams and defining how they are responsible for achieving the actions associated with each program. Getting these new City staff teams in place and partnering together has been a major success story in this first year.

The Annual Report is organized in two parts. The first part focuses on how *Imagine Austin* is being implemented through this five-point program: Education & Engagement; Internal Alignment; Regulations; Public Investment; and Partnerships. The second part of the report looks to how the City is implementing key *Imagine Austin* actions through the eight priority programs. The second part of the Annual Report also provides a number of indicators that give us a sense of where the city is doing well and highlights areas where improvements need to be made and what areas need further assessment.

Additionally, we would like to offer the following specific comments for consideration as the City continues to implement *Imagine Austin*. The following issues have been identified throughout this process: Transportation, Household Affordability, Water, Economy and Employment, and Neighborhood Plans.

- **Transportation:** The Austin region must continue to look for innovative ways to develop a comprehensive transportation system that includes sidewalks, bicycle lanes, streets, urban trails and transit. This will involve finding additional funding sources, strategically investing in transportation, coordinating among partners, and aligning transportation with the use of land that serves our residents and protects our environment. *Specifically, we believe that City Planning and Engineering staff need to focus resources on those activity corridors, activity centers, and redevelopment areas already seeing substantial development.*

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- Household Affordability: Austin has growing and complex housing needs – including gaps in permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless, housing for low-wage workers, home repairs for low-income senior homeowners, and homeownership opportunities for moderate-income families. We are a growing community with changing demographics.

The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan has provided the vision for “complete communities” in which all areas of town have a strong foundation, including a diverse housing stock. Household affordability needs to be tackled on multiple levels including the promotion of different price points to allow for various income levels.

- Economy and Employment: While the City continues to have a strong economy, especially compared to national trends, we must continue to diversify our economy. We need to address the growing cost of living and initiate economic development strategies that focus on providing the right jobs for our most cost burdened and disadvantage population so that they can also prosper in our dynamic economy and thus maintain their ability to remain residents in our City.
- Water: While the City of Austin has water rights and long-term firm water agreements for more than twice as much water as Austin currently uses from the Highland Lakes, the ongoing and unpredictable severe drought has underscored the importance of protecting the City’s water supply. Consistent with Imagine Austin’s vision and guidance, the City must both continue to advance its water conservation and reuse efforts while also increasing its vigilance in protecting the City’s water supply. There is a graph produced by the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) on page 54 that projects water supply to February 2014, which is a short-term projection. The City should continue requesting the LCRA make long-range water supply projections to help Austin plan accordingly.

During the previous 12 months, the water storage has decreased by 232,000 acre feet (AF). As can be seen from the chart, the water storage was slightly above 700,000 acre feet on August 1. Austin presently uses between 150,000 and 160,000 AF feet per year, although that number is likely to be below 150,000 AF this year. If combined storage levels drop below 600,000 AF, the LCRA Board will declare a drought worse than the drought of record and require mandatory water cutbacks of 20%, initially, for firm water customers – although Austin has already reached the level called for in a 20% curtailment.

The Planning Commission encourages the City Council to continue to advance Austin Water’s efforts in seeking changes to LCRA’s water management plan revisions, currently pending and being evaluated by TCEQ. There should also be consideration given for contingency plans to augment Austin’s water supply from sources other than the Highland Lakes.

- Neighborhood Plans: The South Austin Combined Neighborhood is presently working on their neighborhood plan within the framework of Imagine Austin. Each neighborhood plan embraces that neighborhood’s culture and sense of place while addressing identified needs. While we have unique neighborhoods, most neighborhoods have similar concerns including sidewalks, safety of transportation, street lighting, creek flooding, maintaining neighborhood character,

continued affordability for residents and public safety. As stated in *Imagine Austin*, the neighborhoods want their plans to be reflected in *Imagine Austin*. As we move forward with implementing *Imagine Austin*, the City must continue to recognize these plans and provide additional information when available to better inform participants' recommendations in order to provide more long-range and flexible plans.

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We commend the work City staff and various departments have done to implement *Imagine Austin* and create the first Annual Report, and the work that will be done in the coming years. Austin's success will depend upon the partnerships formed between the community, city and business. During this next year the Comprehensive Plan Committee will be proactive with city staff to set goals where they are needed. We appreciate your attention to these matters and as always, welcome your questions and comments.

Regards,

Richard Hatfield Chair Comprehensive Plan Committee

Dave Anderson Chair Planning Commission